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ABSTRACT

The questions addressed in this study concern the effects of diverse secondary school environments on Black males' perceptions of achievement and identity. Data were collected over a 2-year period utilizing discussion, observation, surveys (questions included), and interviews with Black males in five high schools in Jackson, Mississippi: (1) Bailey Alternative Secondary, a magnet school emphasizing cooperation and group learning; (2) Murrah High School representing the former all-white flagship school of the pre-desegregation era; (3) Lanier High School, an inner city school; (4) St. Joseph's Catholic High School, a suburban, racially integrated secondary school; and (5) Piney Woods Country Life, a private boarding school outside the city limits with a history as a predominantly Black school. Results suggest that most Black men desire the same opportunities in life as their white counterparts, and they appear not to suffer from low self-esteem or low self-evaluation of academic potential. However, there appears to be a lack of interest and investment in education as a means of getting ahead in life. Specific intervention strategies are recommended for education communities that contain significant Black populations. (LL)

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"Lost Voices: Reflections on Education From An Imperiled Generation" (An examination of attitudes of black males towards education at five secondary schools with distinct sagas.)

Louis B. Gallien, Jr.

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Introduction

The decline in Black males' matriculation to institutions of higher education has been well-chronicled within this decade. Little research, however, has been conducted on their actual attitudes towards schooling and its relevance to their lives. Many hypotheses have been forwarded (e.g., changing demographics in Black family life, racism, drugs, lower expectations, etc.), but there has been a noticeable lack of ethnographic research on the subject of attitudes and perceptions towards formalized schooling's relationship to Black Males' sense of self-identity and destiny.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the effects of differential secondary school environments on Black males' perceptions of achievement and identity. Its conclusions emerge from discussions, participants observations, surveys, and interviews with Black males in five different high schools in Jackson, Mississippi. The research was conducted over a two-year period at these five different high schools, which have distinct educational missions and histories:

Bailey Alternative Secondary School is a magnet school which emphasizes cooperation and group learning (both in and outside

the classroom) to encourage a more conducive environment for learning, especially for predominately minority student body. Using as their knowledge base studies by Johnson and Johnson (University of Minnesota) and Robert Slavin (Johns Hopkins), Bailey Alternative seeks to attract students who desire cooperative modes of learning in contrast to the traditional competitive environments at other educational institutions.

Murrah High School, directly across from Bailey, represents the former all-white flagship school of the pre-desegregation era of Jackson City Schools. After desegregation and subsequent "white flight", the school has become a predominately black high school. With a strong history of achievement both in the classroom and on sporting fields, the school has an almost mythical past which is associated solely with its former students, many of whom hold key leadership positions in Jackson and across the state of Mississippi. In many ways, Murrah represented the "Old South," and it has one of the strongest educational institutional histories in the state. The school provides an intriguing study of the effects of a proud history on a student population entirely different from its predecessors.

In a segregated area, Lanier High School maintains the dubious distinction of being the "roughest" inner city school in Jackson. It has the highest rates of teenage pregnancy and incidents of violence in the public school system. Consequently, it mirrors conditions found in many inner-city schools across America.

St. Joseph's Catholic High School is a suburban, racially integrated, secondary school. It is the only White-majority school represented in this study. However, the minority population is significant (30%). St. Joseph's provides an opportunity to study the attitudes of Black males in comparison with the literature of James Coleman (Chicago) and Valerie Lee (Michigan), which maintains that parochial schools have an inordinately positive effect on academic achievement among minority groups when compared to public education.

Piney Woods Country Life is a private boarding school outside the Jackson City limits with a strong and proud history as a predominately Black school. Piney Woods has maintained a reputation as an extraordinary school, with structure and singleness of purpose. All students must perform manual labor, and classes are segregated by gender. An emphasis on a life of discipline and achievement pervades the writings and attitudes of the administration. Their chief academic officer, Dr. Charles Beady, subscribes to the "effective school" philosophy made popular by Wilbur Brookover (Michigan State Univ.) and the late Rod Edmonds.

This paper provides information on the attitudes of Black males in these different institutional environments in an attempt to discover ways to improve strategies for assisting Black males educational achievement.

Cultural Dissonance in Educational Beliefs

The dissonance which many blacks feel towards "integrated"

schooling is more easily understood within the context of the long history of segregated education in America. Janice Hale-Benson and others (e.g., Wade Boykin and John Ogbu) persuasively argue that dominant white culture holds basic assumptions about education that are in direct conflict with the pedagogy of African-American culture. These pedagogical issues center upon cooperation, classroom interaction, and curriculum.[1]

In her study of Afro-American culture and history, Hale-Benson contends that the culture transmitted to Black children by their families and churches stands in sharp contrast to the dominant culture's approach to education they encounter when they arrive in integrated schools. This dominant teaching methodology (Hale-Benson and others suggest) pushes students towards competitive relationships in the classroom, isolated "seatwork," an inordinate amount of rewards, and misplaced reliance on logical-mathematical skills coupled with a Eurocentric curriculum that leaves little room for a study of Black children's historical and cultural identity [beyond] slavery. The effect is that many Black people see little congruence between their experience in integrated schools and their historical and cultural upbringing and beliefs about education. In addition,

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[1]. Janice Hale-Benson, Black Children: Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles. Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore and London, 1986.

Black males have problems in the classroom which are unique to their gender.[2]

Classroom Environment

The typical classroom in America is led by a white female, usually in her late thirties.[3] Most of these teachers have neither the cross-cultural background nor adequate teacher education experience (both curricular and clinical/field) to equip them with the tools to effectively educate Black students, especially Black males. Typical Black male behavior in the classroom, such as "wolfing," "pimping," and "jiving," is viewed (by white females) as hostile, threatening, and inappropriate in the classroom. In a review of the literature on early Black male achievement in elementary school, Jacqueline Irvine notes that young black males are:

--- more likely to have nonacademic interactions with peers;

--- more likely to use a cooperative learning style, (which in the findings of Michelle Fine is frequently mislabeled as cheating);[4]

--- more likely to receive controlling statements and qualified praise;

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[2]. see also: Wade Nobles, "Africans and Black Families", The Black Scholar. 1974, 5, 10-17.

[3]. James Johnson, et.al., Introduction to the Foundations of Education, Allyn and Bacon, 1990, p. 7.

[4]. Michelle Fine. "Silencing in Public Schools", Language Arts, Vol. 64, No. 2, February 1987.

--- less likely to receive positive feedback;

--- more likely to receive nonverbal criticism

--- more likely to be isolated socially and academically from white students;

---more likely than white males to be sent to the principal's office.[5]

Bruce Hare contends that "Black males are probably the most feared, least likely to be identified with, and least likely to be effectively taught."[6] Conversely, a significant number of Black males are still affected by the historical "subservient" model. These students accept a passive role in the classroom, and their school "work" rarely rises above the level of their boisterous peers. The result is that many teachers believe that Black male students' capacity for learning is limited. Consequently, both subservient and typical groups experience alienation from the learning process.[7]

While the alienation can be minimized and reformed through greater awareness of the needs of Black males, female teachers are limited as essential role models. The universal dearth of Black male teachers, especially in the early grades, is highly problematic for Black males. What they see and experience in their neighborhoods (with regard to role models) differs

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[5]. Jacqueline J. Irvine. Black Students and School Failure. Greenwood Press, 1990. pp. 77-73.

[6]. op.cit., p. 78.

[7]. op. cit., Hale-Benson.

drastically from the images they receive at school. It is widely agreed that Black males need to have direct relationships with adult Black males who will provide the support needed to further their education and serve as visible alternatives to the volatile models provided by the media and neighborhood streets.[8]

Also, the absence of positive role models for Black males, as Jawanza Kunjufu and others suggest, causes them to rely on the values they learn from their peers.[9] The consequences are evident in the daily news in every major city. Unfortunately, the adolescent peer group is caught in a dilemma. Two anthropologists, Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu, discovered that the fear of "acting white" and fear of becoming the "other" was a motivating factor in underachievement among Black males.[10] They suggest that this attitude grows both from low expectations that white Americans have of Blacks and low expectations that have taken root in the Black community. Consequently, Black males are worried simultaneously about being ostracized from their own community and not being accepted into the larger white community. Carter Woodson's evaluation of the Miseducation of the Negro may be considered as relevant today as in 1933:

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[8]. "Finding More Black Male Teachers For America's Classrooms", Pipeline, Spring/Summer, 1990, p. 17.

[9]. Jawanza Kunjufu, To Be Popular or Smart: The Black Peer Group, Chicago: African American Images, 1988.

[10]. "Homogeneous Classes May Be Best to Curb Male Dropout Rate" Black Issues in Higher Education, January 18, 1990. p.10.

"When a Negro has finished his education in our schools, he has been equipped to begin the life of an Americanized or Europeanized white man...he is told by his teachers that he must go back to his own people from whom he has been estranged by a vision of ideals which he will realize in his disillusionment that he cannot attain. He goes forth to play his part in life but he must be both social and bisocial at the same time...Considering his race as blank in achievement, then, he must stimulate their imitation of others."[11]

Demographic Barriers

The severity of the overall problem needs to be underscored by recounting certain demographic trends. If trends continue, by the year 2000 it is conceivable that up to 70% of the Black men in this country may be either dead, awaiting trial, imprisoned or addicted to drugs.[12]

Black males suffer from debilitating health problems to a greater degree than males in other ethnic and racial groups. They have a higher death rate, a lower life expectancy, and a greater incidence of serious disease.

In 1984, 30% of those who died from drug abuse were Black males, 35% of all AIDS cases among teenagers are Black males.

Black Americans constitute 11% of the population; but they make up 34% of the prison population. (The percentages are

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[11]Carter Woodson. The Miseducation of the Negro, New York: AMS Press, 1977 (2nd ed.).

[12]. Statistics compiled by The Seventh Annual Status Report: Minorities in Higher Education, written by Reginald Wilson and Deborah Carr. (American Council on Education: Office of Minority Concerns, January 1990.)

higher in the deep South. In Georgia's Gwinett County Prison the mean educational level for Black males was 5th grade.)

Between 1973 and 1986 average real earnings for Black men ages 20-24 fell by 50% in 1986 real average earnings for Black men averaged $7,447.00.

In school, Black males are disciplined, expelled, and suspended at higher rates than any other group, and they are more likely than Whites to be diagnosed as mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed.

Black students are disproportionately represented in low-ability groups and seldom tracked in college preparatory courses. Fewer than 30% of all Black students take courses that prepare them for a four-year college. In the deep South the percentages are even lower.

Of all Black males in college, 43% enroll in two-year colleges, but only 10% make the transition to four-year colleges. Among Black males who did enroll in Atlanta area colleges (which included two predominately Black colleges) in 1986-87, 76.2% were held back or dropped out during their first year.

Rising tuition and decreases in federal aid will continue to negatively affect Black males, many of whom cannot reasonably envision any income for four years.

As standardized tests become the touchstone for proven academic success, Black men will have a harder time in academe. As psychologist Howard Gardner suggests, there are more ways to measure intelligence and academic potential than limited multiple

choice tests which measure only quickness of thought and logical/mathematical skills. There is also the volatile issue of inherent cultural bias in most standardized tests.[13]

There is a gender gap that will adversely affect educated Black women who desire to be married and raise children as they leave behind (in greater numbers vis-a-vis their professional status) their male counterparts. And, as James Comer notes, the Black men who have benefitted from a college degree "are not getting married and won't be getting married. It means there will be that many fewer Black families whose children receive the kind of nurturing from birth that builds motivation to succeed."[14]

Given the current national demographics, coupled with various classroom experiences and readings on Black issues in education and society, I decided that more research was needed on the actual activities and perceptions of Black males concerning their education and future. A singular classroom experience led me to a two-year quest in Jackson, Mississippi.

Background

This project was inspired by observation of an English class at Bailey Alternative Secondary School. A student teacher from a predominantly white, upper-middle class college was conducting

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[13]. Howard Gardner, Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences, New York: Basic Books, 1983.

[14]. Lee A. Daniels, "Ranks of Black Men Shrink on U.S. Campuses". New York Times, February 5, 1989, pp. 15, 27.

this class of students in a predominately Black, lower-class alternative high school across the street from the college. These demographics serve to highlight the stark differences in schooling in Mississippi from elementary school through college. While "White flight" is ubiquitous nationwide, disparate economic conditions and a large non-White population combine to create "caste-like" conditions of life and education in Jackson in the postbusing era.

Of 100 pupils in the JPS system 95 have both parents who work away from home; 65 are from low socio-economic families; 25 live in poverty; 50 come from single-parent homes; 10 have parents that are either illiterate or under-educated; 12 are born out of wedlock; 15 are born to teenage mothers; 35 will drop out of school; 18 will fail at least one subject or grade each year.[15]

A Day in School

The class began with the usual administrative details, which were adroitly attended to by Toni, one of my student interns. After the various details were quickly dismissed, Toni requested that each student hand in the assignment from the previous day. While I was taking notes, Toni grew increasingly frustrated over the lack of response from a particular group. After receiving little response from this group about WHY they had failed to do the writing assignment, she requested that they complete it in

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[15]. Statistics compiled by the Jackson Public School System, JPS Pupil Profile. 1988.

single-case study, I felt that I could better understand this issue if I studied several different schools in the area. Besides, I had the enviable fortune to have the five secondary schools already described in close proximity.

Bailey Alternative Secondary School

When I have asked students to describe Bailey, the word frequently used is "prison." A creation of an early 1940's "blank slate" architecture, Bailey was featured in Time magazine in the early forties as a good example of a neo-classical design mixed with modern facades. Students today find this description hard to believe as the faceless and nondescript front rises eminently from a major Jackson thoroughfare, State Street. When talking to residents immediately surrounding the school (retirees), I found their memories of the school inevitably harken to a bygone era. The euphemism "before integration" punctuates many of their recollections of the school. (A prevailing theme at another school near Bailey which I examined.) One of my "field" students attended Bailey when it was "the premier" junior high school in Jackson. She was "apprehensive" about her first visit, since she had not set foot in the school after integration. Stories of violence, drug dealing, and (more frighteningly for residents) gang activities abounded during the first few years of its re-chartering in 1984. Indeed, during my research those conditions were a "given" among most white residents when describing any city school in Jackson--AFTER INTEGRATION.

Bailey's stated mission is to:

> emphasize student participation in and responsibility for their education. Teachers plan and structure learning experiences and activities for students, but students are central; only they can process these experiences and activities into academic and intellectual growth. Students become actively involved by having choices, making decisions, and engaging in learning experiences and activities that are participatory and elicit higher level learning.
>
> The open education philosophy is also apparent in the climate of the school. The structure of the school and the classrooms facilitates student development of self-discipline and a sense of responsibility. Students are encouraged to interact, cooperate, and collaborate with each other, faculty, administrators, and parents and to participate in the governance of the school. A less formal atmosphere enables students, staff, and parents to move away from competitive relationships toward cooperative ones. The emphasis is on the creation of a sense of community, a community built on the common goals of working hard cooperatively and collaboratively to do the best work one is capable of doing...[16]

The school is, in the words of out-going principal Mary Ramberg, "in an evolving state." The founders of the school, (Mary being in that number), had successfully lobbied the JPS school system for an alternative, open-education elementary school a few years before the opening of Bailey. The school board acquiesced, partly out of the desperate need for something different to attract white students to the school system, and more importantly for the concerned parents, in order to provide a necessary continuation for the "alternative" elementary students attended an open education school before entering Bailey.

When the school opened in 1984, Mary related that

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[16]. Handbook of Bailey Alternative Secondary Magnet School, Jackson Public Schools. edited by Mary Ramberg.

administrators from surrounding schools viewed its opening as an opportunity to "dump" problem students into this new "alternative" school. When she confronted these same administrators (many of whom were sending their "delinquents" and "incorrigibles" to Bailey), she recalled that they blithely responded that they thought Bailey's mission was to provide an "alternative" to students who experienced failure in traditional settings. She quickly informed them that this was not the raison d'etre behind the school. The school was intended for students who CHOSE to come to school in order to learn and graduate, not for students who desired a less formal and more free-wheeling "holding tank" until their sixteenth birthday.

Four years later the school is well on its way towards providing a safe and humane environment for all its students. The two largest challenges are to increase minority achievement and attracting more white students. The need for attracting more white students stems from a larger problem which the school district as a whole has had to deal with since desegregation--lost support from the groups who control the economic and political system of Jackson. Like many urban areas in diverse regions of the U.S., public education's viability or its perceived ability to "deliver the goods," is at a very low point in American history. When you couple this perception with a disintegrating Black male population in schools, you have a scenario for a national disaster.

	Bailey (Alternative Magnet School)	Murrah ("Premier" High School)	Lanier (Inner-City)	St. Joe's (Catholic)	Piney Woods (Boarding School)
1.	C/C+ B/A	C+/B	C/B	B/B+	B/B+
2.	Most Do Not	13 hrs./wk.	5.5/hrs.wk.	Most work	All work 10/20 hrs.
3.	Mildly Favorable	Very Positive	Very Positive	Positive/ Challenging	Positive
4.	Sports and Movie Men	No One	Wide Range (inc. politicians)	Diverse	Entertainers Business/no one
5.	Academics	Graduating	Academics	Advanced Degree	College
6.	Job/College	Job/College	Job/College	Prof. Ed.	College
7.	Sports	Diverse Profs.	Diverse	Professions (i.e., Law)	Professions (i.e., Law)
8.	Understanding intelligent Many did not have one.	Affective	50% No one Affective	Academic	Affective
9.	50% attend	75% voluntary	50% voluntary	ALL	ALL
10.	Crime violence,drugs	Widely diverse	quality of life	Social concerns	Racism,jobs
11.	Sports	Physical Activities	Physical Activities	Academics	Sports
12.	Parents Peers choose #2	Parents/Split	Parents/even split	Parents/even split	Parents
13.	High Visibility Sports Colleges	Black Colleges	Academic/Black	Academic	Black Colleges
14.	Money & Power Intelligence/ Character	Positive Diversity Altruistic	High Self-esteem & Ambition	Honest Tough Friendly Competitive	Positive Diversity

Survey-Interview Guide

A wide-ranging, two-page survey was distributed at all five schools. The following questions served as a starting point followed by observations, interviews, and data collection from the individual schools and the JPS central office.

1. Age, Race, Grade Point Average, Potential grade point average. This category was necessary as some classes contained non-minority students (about 4%). The grade point average was asked as a means of referencing their potential GPA which I felt was more important than their actual GPA, since their perception of their academic abilities was an important indicator of their belief in their attainment level.

2. Do you work outside of school? If yes, how many hours a week? This was asked to discover how many young men maintained jobs outside the home or school.

3. When someone asks you how you feel about school, what do you usually say? This question is self-explanatory and one that was meant to serve as an "ice-breaker".

4. If you could trade places with any person, who would it be and why? I was looking for answers which would offer me clues to their heroes or possible role models.

5. Which single accomplishment would make your parent(s) proud of you? This was asked with the hope that it would offer some indication of parental expectation.

6. How will your high school diploma help you in the future? I felt the answers would give me a good definition of their idea of

the congruity or incongruity of formalized schooling with their world.

7. What would you like to do for a living?

8. What is the most important characteristic of your all-time favorite teacher? I was looking for a composite of traits which were important to them.

9. Do you regularly attend religious services? If yes, do you attend because you have to or want to? This question came to mind after listening to an address given by Marian Wright Edelman at Tougaloo College, where she linked the loss of community spirit and responsibility in Black neighborhoods with the decline of church attendance among Black youth.

10. If you could change one aspect of life in the U.S., what would it be and why? I felt this question would give Black youths the opportunity to respond to their perceptions of injustices in American society.

11. What activity do you really enjoy working hard for and why? This question was meant to be as open-ended as it suggests.

12. Who influences you more--parents, relatives, brothers/sisters, friends--and why?

13. If you could attend any college in the country, which one would you choose and why? I wanted to know if a particular type of institution predominated (e.g., sports reputation, academic reputation, in-state preference, and awareness of a range of choice--private/public Black colleges, etc.)

14. What do you want to be known for--A man of _____?

This question has direct links to self-image and a sense of destiny.

Responses from Bailey Alternative High School

The average grade point average self-reported was in the C/C+ range. Almost all of the respondents commented that their potential was between a solid B or low A average. This was important for it told me that they felt that a higher grade point average was within their reach. Conversely, very few felt that they were close to reaching their academic potential. In follow-up discussions, many young men felt that they were attending a school that was "inviting" them to succeed rather than "challenging" them to succeed--that the pervading philosophy of the school was based on cooperation and partnership in the learning process rather than on an inordinate amount of emphasis on competition in the classroom.

Most students did not work. The few that did worked only several hours a week. While I was somewhat surprised, I quickly understood that the job market was limited for them. Unfortunately, some young men were involved in drug activity, which provided some income.

A significant majority of men when asked their feelings toward school responded in a mildly favorable manner. Very few were hostile or ambivalent. Conversely, few were effusive in their praise of school.

When asked about trading places with anyone, the

overwhelming majority named sports figures and movie stars such as Eddie Murphy, Michael Jordan, and Mike Tyson. Conversely, the few white students responding to this survey almost exclusively named hard-rock music groups.

Regarding their perceptions of their parents' aspirations for them, a significant majority felt that academic achievement would please their parents, well ahead of athletic performance.

The value of a high school diploma was evenly divided between imperatives of the workplace and entrance to college. If this attitude could be sustained, one would expect college attendance to reach 50%; however, the current rate of Black male college attendance from Bailey mirrors the dismal drop of the decade (3.5%).

Sports continued to dominate their answers to questions regarding their future, their idea of a worthwhile profession, and what they really enjoyed working hard at/for. A distinct minority, however, mentioned careers in the traditional professions (e.g., medicine, architecture, engineering). This was consistent with their responses about whom they would trade places with.

Parent(s) tended to have the most influence on their decisions, with friends a close second choice. It was heartening to read and hear of the admiration expressed towards their parent(s).

Regarding their participation in religious activities, there was a decided split between attending church services because

they wanted to and non-attendance.

"Understanding," intelligent," "could make the material understandable," "enthusiastic," and "genuinely cared for me" typified many of the responses regarding the characteristic most appreciated in their favorite teachers. Many, however, responded by saying/writing that they did not have a favorite teacher.

High visibility "sports" colleges were dominant among colleges they would like to attend. A significant number, however, mentioned Harvard, which would lead one to believe that academic reputation is also important to many of them. Another significant number mentioned historically Black colleges in Mississippi.

When asked what they would want to be known for, their responses centered on the themes of money and power and intelligence and character. These four themes are ubiquitous among this age and culture. Given society's emphasis on material goods and possession and the school's emphasis on academic attainment, the division of responses is easily understood.

Much of Bailey's mission remains to be fulfilled. Many teachers, parents, and administrators look to the current generation of students across town at the Davis Alternative Elementary School as the generation who may fulfill the dreams that fueled the beginnings of the alternative mágnet program in Jackson Public Schools. Many of these students will matriculate to Bailey, and the "experiment" in open education based on

cooperation will have its first complete class. In the meantime, the school is seeking to consolidate its reputation as a school for serious students who take responsibility for their education.

From the survey responses and interviews with Black males at Bailey, the majority seem to favor the environment of the school, and many refer to the relaxed, almost laid-back atmosphere. However, many have not taken full academic advantage of this environment, as evidenced by their GPA and personal observations coupled with low attendance rates at post-secondary institutions.

There remain fundamental differences between what the school teaches them about their potential and their perception of what it takes (or means) to forward their career goals. This is especially evident in their responses relative to future vocations and heroes. While many different groups (White males included) have fanciful or romantic dreams for their lives (e.g. entertainment, sports fields), most do not maintain the consistency of response of these Black men.

Murrah High School

Murrah High School is down the street from Bailey Alternative Secondary School. Both schools have new identities since their beginnings as schools (jr. and sr. high) for upper-middle class students in Jackson. While Bailey holds a special place in the hearts of students who appreciate the architectural uniqueness of their former junior high school, Murrah summons the strongest memories from its alumni, many of whom still live in

the adjoining neighborhood of Belhaven.

In order to understand how strong Murrah's legacy remains, one would only have to talk to Belhaven residents. Several generations of Murrah High alums recall with great relish the "glory" years of their school--the national recognition for their academic program, the courage and strength of their athletic teams, and the overall excellence of their faculty. And then there was desegregation.....

The physical plant looks much the way students from the sixties remember and resembles many of the schools built a few decades ago--long, angular brick buildings, nondescript, but clean and orderly. The grounds surrounding the building are plain and the athletic fields and courts surrounding the school are in need of a face-lift. On the inside the school mirrors the exterior, with long hallways lined with lockers. Many of its former alumni say the building has not changed--just the people.

The demography of Murrah has radically changed from its neighborhood roots. Black students from across town (southwest side) are now the majority group--around 85%, while a couple of private schools--Jackson Prep and Jackson Academy, located in the affluent northeast side of the city-- contain many of the children of Murrah High alumni. As a result of the massive white flight of the seventies, Murrah High School changed practically overnight. Its saga remains.

I was interested in how that history might affect its current student population. I was not prepared, however, for the

responses of the white male students I interviewed and surveyed. In contrast to the other four schools, I received a significant number of survey responses from White males. This was due to an English class (randomly chosen) that contained many White males. Initially, I did not think their responses would hold much significance until I casually noticed that there were some interesting differences between the responses of White and Black males in this class, especially in contrast to Bailey's male population.

Responses--from Murrah High School

One striking feature of the response of Black men at Murrah was their overwhelmingly positive view of school as a direct contrast to Bailey Black and White students and Murrah White students. There were very few negative responses regarding how they felt about life at Murrah. While some were bored, none were hostile. Again, in contrast, the White males at Murrah were not only bored but rabid in their dislike of school life: "I hate it to death"; "It sucks"; "Hate it"; "I don't like it"; "It's boring"; "Not nearly challenging enough." None of the white students surveyed or interviewed praised the school. The strongest endorsement was from a few who merely "tolerated" it.

When questioned more closely, many White students felt that they were looked down upon for "having" to attend Murrah. Many had close friends at other schools; and only finances, district zones, or sheer disinterest kept them from attending either a private or county school. While there was little evidence of

direct hostility towards Black students, there was an ambivalence about the school that reached into every facet and domain of school life: teachers, administrators, and extra-curricular activities. Conversely, Black males not only felt good about being at Murrah but their responses relating to their actual and potential GPA more closely correlated. The difference in their perceived potential was less than a half of a grade point (.5, C+/B), while the responses from White students revealed twice the differential, or a full grade point below their perceived ability. In light of their attitudes toward the school, the differential is not surprising.

In contrast to Bailey and to White students at Murrah, Black male respondents worked an average of thirteen hours a week. I had to revise my previous notion of a universal lack of employment opportunities in Jackson (based on responses from black men at Bailey) after reviewing the responses at Murrah. It is important to realize that there was little difference in the socio-economic status of the two groups; therefore, I had to question the validity of the contention of some students at Bailey that employment opportunities were limited. What they may have felt was that <u>good-paying</u> jobs were unavailable!

Another striking contrast about Black males at Murrah in relation to the other male groups centered upon who they would like to trade places with in life. A clear majority responded by writing: "No one, I am pleased with myself." The few that did have heroes cited well-known entertainment or sports figures.

However, the significance of the majority's responses correlated well with their sense of satisfaction with their educational environment. There was a wide array of jobs and professions in which they wanted to be involved after graduation. There was an even division between careers that required a college degree and others which required a high school diploma with some post-secondary technical training.

In regard to the Black male's perception of what accomplishment would make their parent(s) proud, most referred to either graduating, obtaining a job, or attending college. The response was universal.

There was a significant division of opinion regarding WHAT a high school diploma represented. Most White males regarded the diploma as either a steppingstone to a job (50%) or entrance to college (50%). Black males related it to attainment of a job first (75%) and then college (25%). Their answers suggested that college attendance is not perceived as primary to Black males's career goals. This was antithetical to their responses about their attitudes towards school and overall optimistic views of their academic potential. As I mentioned earlier, the perception/reality of the incongruity between life at school and the "real" world is mirrored in their responses. Those responses also concur with John Ogbu's research:"Blacks may say they believe schools help people to get ahead, but actually they do not buy the White middle-class folk theory of achievement through

education."[17]

Again, important teacher characteristics did not meet with enthusiastic responses. Many did not respond. The ones who did mentioned: "sense of humor," "cared," "fun," and "understanding." The similarity of response is easily categorized in the effective areas of teaching and learning. Clearly, students want someone to be personable with them in the school environment.

Another stark contrast between White and Black males at Murrah centered on church attendance, with an overwhelming majority of Black men (75%) stating that they attended church regularly on a voluntary basis. Conversely, a clear majority of white males did not attend, nor were they forced to by their parents.

Both groups discussed a wide range of important issues they would deal with if given a leadership role. What I found interesting is that race was a non-issue for both groups. Few even mentioned race relations as a pressing problem. Many mentioned diverse global issues. I believe their responses reflect favorably upon the diversity of social issues teachers focus on while at Murrah.

There was a distinct difference between the two groups with regard to activities they enjoyed working hard at/for. Most White males responded with diverse interests: drawing,

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[17]. M. Sandra Reeves, "Self-Interest and the Common Weal: Focusing on the Bottom Half", Education Week, April 27, 1988, p.18.

motorcycling, cooking, theater, reading. Black males universally enjoyed physical activities. One Black male responded: "...one day I want to have a body and mind I feel is right...."

While the subject of physicality's playing an inordinate role with young Black males has been extensively debated, the reality is that in lower-income neighborhoods physical activity is one of the few "free" activities. Beyond that, and peculiar to the deep South, there are an inordinate number of historically Black colleges combined with a great number of high achieving sports colleges (LSU, Alabama, etc.) which provide many Black role models for these youths.

Parents again were the most influential persons mentioned by Black males, while there was an even division among friends, parents, and no one among White males, whose feeling of deliberate isolation from their environment was telling. Not only do many of the White males feel isolated at school, but many also feel isolated at home.

The students listed a wide range of colleges they would attend if given the opportunity: from the recognized academic colleges--Harvard, Yale, MIT, NYU; Duke to the highly visible sports powers--Alabama, UCLA, LSU, Notre Dame; and the historically black colleges--Xavier, Grambling, Alcorn and Jackson State. The White males mostly responded with the names of colleges in-state. I was struck by the diversity and interest of Black males in the afore-mentioned institutions. However, White males named colleges which they would LIKELY attend, while

Black males named colleges which would be on their "wish list." The actual demographic trends at Murrah suggest that few Black men attend college, and the majority of those who do attend matriculate to the historically Black colleges in Mississippi: Jackson State, Alcorn, etc. While Black men are well aware of the numerous colleges throughout the U.S., their financial condition and their ambivalence about moving too far from home are major factors behind their final collegiate decision.

In the important area of self-esteem, or what they would want to be known for, Black men responded with positive diversity: "strength, knowledge, kindness, skill, word, taste, all seasons, mind and muscle, respect, determination, power, wisdom, greatness, talent, character, intelligence, high expectations, style, honesty and pride." There were very few overlaps in written responses. This concurs with the research of Morris Rosenberg and Roberta Simmons conducted years ago which concluded that self-esteem was not a problem with Black youth in context of academic achievement. (see: Morris Rosenberg and Roberta Simmons, Black and White Self-Esteem: The Urban Child. Washington: American Sociological Association, 1971.)

I had thought my major focus at Murrah would be the effects of its strong saga on a different population of students. What I discovered is that the history had no visible negative effect on Black students; in fact, most were content at Murrah. The general degree of alienation of White males was striking and understandable, given the former exclusiveness and reputation of

Murrah which they no longer could relate to as new era students. While this was generally discouraging, the indifference or the perceived lack of opportunity for Black males regarding higher education was/is equally discouraging. Neither ignorance nor lack of ability nor self-esteem is to blame at Murrah. The barriers are deeply rooted and must be examined in comparison to the other secondary schools.

Lanier High School

While Murrah High School conjures up images of past glory for Jackson residents, Lanier's reputation reflects both a proud past as a historically Black high school coupled with its present notoriety as a "tough" inner-city school. Lanier is also unique in that a former student of mine (Charles Sallis) provided one of his English classes for the project. Accordingly, Mr. Sallis provides a description of his high school:

> Lanier High School is located in central Jackson, west Bailey Avenue, and north of Fortification Street. The school has been an integral part of the immediate community called Georgetown. Lanier has been known as a "historically black" school; that is to say that it was formed and constructed in the 1930's to serve the Black community. After desegregation in 1969, Lanier remained totally black.
>
> Most of the students come from lower-income families. The head of the household is usually comprised of a single parent. Most parents have not finished a formal educational process. Many of the students feel that their future is dim and unfulfilling; hence, a lack of effort in school appears totally justified.
>
> Positive role models in the students' neighborhoods are practically non-existent. If positive role models are present, they are usually targets of ridicule. Negative role models are in abundance, and the emulation of their behavior patterns is clearly exhibited by many of the students. The main role models for these students are prostitutes, drug dealers, pimps, gang leaders, manual laborers.

> As the students lack positive role models, they reach out to ones who are far removed from the deprived environment in which they reside--athletes, musicians, actors, and other entertainers. Students constantly express their desires for large homes, expensive cars, and large amounts of money. The process by which these things are normally attained is foreign to many of them.
>
> There is very little reading done at home; many students feel that reading is a waste of time. Many parents do nothing to dispel that belief. Based on my observations, at least half of the students at Lanier are victims of daily abuse. Much of the abuse is verbal, which in and of itself is devastating; however, physical abuse is also evident.
>
> Pregnancies among students would be considered phenomenal at many schools; at Lanier it is accepted as part of the culture. A new pregnancy is treated matter-of-factly with a shrug and an off-hand comment. The students are beautiful, observant, curious, and lively. Their backgrounds, however, seem to have convinced many of them that their life is of little value, and their potential contributions to humanity are minimal at best.

It is important to note that Mr. Sallis' comments were written before he viewed the results of the survey; therefore, his comments provide an interesting juxtaposition with his students' views on life and schooling at Lanier.

Responses--Lanier High School

Most students were performing at a "C" level, while many felt they could do about a full grade better. Work posed no barrier to their achievement level, as very few held traditional jobs outside school. The average work week for the few that were employed was approximately 20 hours. Taken as a class average, it would figure to 5.5 hours a week compared to double digit work hours at the other schools.

Attitudes towards school were (again) overwhelmingly positive. After initial skepticism on my part, I soon discovered that there was something "special" about Mr. Sallis' class; they

universally enjoyed it. This factor, in and of itself, may explain the unanimity of attitude towards school which (I strongly believe) is an extension of their affection for this teacher.

There was a wide range of people students in this class would like to trade places with. This particular group was the first to mention politicians--some named George Bush, Ronald Reagan or Jesse Jackson as men that they would like to trade places with other responses replicated those from the other schools: sports figures, entertainers, etc. A distinct minority of respondents cited relatives or "no one" or gave no response (40%), with "no one" being pre-dominant.

A strong majority of Black men (60%) felt that their parent would be most proud of any academic accomplishment in their high school or college career. About 25% did not respond, and others mentioned attaining a job. One male poignantly responded: "...saving a child's life. Clearly a majority of parents do verbalize (to their sons) the importance of academic achievement.

Again, most students felt that their diploma would lead to a job (80%), while 20% felt that it was a necessary step to entrance to college. No one felt that a diploma was worthless.

Choices of careers were almost evenly divided between vocational/manual labor positions and the traditional professions. "Lawyer" was the most frequently mentioned white collar profession, while a distinct minority named various sports as future careers. This is significant as Mr. Sallis'

observation concerning their attitudes towards future vocations is at odds with their stated desires.

Nearly half of the respondents had no characteristic to share regarding their favorite teacher. A significant number, however, directly or indirectly wrote of their admiration for Mr. Sallis (25%). The positive comments regarding Mr. Sallis centered upon qualities of care, real world relevance, and genuine compassion.

A clear majority of students (55%) attended church regularly on a voluntary basis. The rest either infrequently or involuntarily attended (20%) or rarely attended (25%).

When questioned about their attitudes towards conditions in America, many did not respond (30%), others (30%) mentioned a desire for a better quality of life for Americans. Some felt that government was a problem and not a solution to social problems. About 10% mentioned race as a problem which needed improvement. While the percentage mentioning race as a problem was higher than at the other JPS schools, it was still a distinct minority.

The largest number of students felt good after working hard at physical activities. One male responded: "...it gives me a sense of pride that I need...." Again, self-esteem is tied into a sense of working out and looking good. In comparison to the other schools, a distinct minority (17%) mentioned academic activities.

Again, an overwhelming percentage of men mentioned parents

as the most influential people in their lives. There was a consistency of response regarding parental concern that can be best characterized by stating that parents wanted them (males) to have a "better life" than they had experienced.

A diversity of colleges was also mentioned by Lanier students with an even division between academic colleges (e.g., Harvard) and in-state, historically Black colleges (e.g., Jackson State). The traditional sports colleges were not as predominate, and a number of students mentioned the formerly segregated state colleges, unlike their counterparts at Bailey and Murrah.

Their responses regarding what they wanted to be known for consistently showed evidence of high self-esteem and ambition, much like men at the other two schools. No one mentioned either completely selfish or undesirable social behavior, such as violence or drugs.

When juxtaposing Mr. Sallis' evaluations of students at Lanier with their responses to the questions, I found a distinct contrast. The student's positive attitudes, I believe, are a direct result of Mr. Sallis' fondness for this particular class. Given the amount of literature which has chronicled the alienation of many students in inner-city schools, the attitudes expressed in this class stand in contrast to some previous studies.

St. Joseph Catholic School

Symbolic of its status as a private, Catholic school, St. Joe's lies just outside the direct city limits of Jackson.

Ironically enough, the location and the physical plant bespeak the current trend of Catholic education. Catholic schools are increasingly attracting a secular student body coupled with a move towards suburban locations. As traditional immigrant populations have moved out of the inner-city, Catholic schools have been forced (economically) to admit diverse groups, mainly Protestant students of color. The school physically resembles a typical suburban public school and its student body reinforces that notion of typicality with its well-dressed, middle-upper class clientele.

This shift in historical function and purpose disturbs the principal of St. Joe's, Larry Oleksiak:

> The result (of economic restraints) is a change in the mix of students, making the student body ever more affluent...not that the children of the wealthy do not need education, but for Catholic schools, it is their intent to educate all Catholics--rich and poor--of the community, exposing them to Christian values and principles, as well as preparing them to succeed in our society. Tuition increases are filtering the lower socio-economic members of the community out of our schools and leaving us with the repugnant label of "elitist"....

The uniqueness of St. Joe's centers upon its ability to attract Black students. The other three prominent private academies of Jackson have either ignored, discouraged, or failed to attract a significant Black population. Beyond the fact that St. Joe's is the sole private academy which Black people attend in significant numbers, the research of James Coleman and Thomas Hoffer suggests that Catholic schools (as a whole) are more successful in educating Black students. While some critics would

argue that any student who can afford the cost of a private education probably comes from a family supporting formal education, Coleman and Hoffer make a strong argument for the "rootedness" and connective nature of family and institution which is uniquely "Catholic."[18] With the above in mind, I was interested to see whether indeed, I could find evidence of this connection.

Response--St. Joe's Catholic School

All of these students listed their numerical grade point average. As a result, their GPA's both actual and potential are exact. The aggregate grade point average is 3.1, with the potential GPA being 3.6--a difference of half a grade point. The potential differential was similar to the other schools, however; the students' recall of a numerical grade point suggests a different attitude towards grading in direct contrast to the previous responses. There is more personal evidence of investment in the education system as a whole.

Very few men worked in contrast to lower-middle class students of Murrah High. This also can be contrasted to other suburban schools where the average work week of comparable high school juniors approaches 20 hours a week, with over half of all students in the work force.

Regarding their attitudes towards school, there were several

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[18] James Coleman and Thomas Hoffer. Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities. New York: Basic Books, 1987.

unique responses that were not found in the public schools. While these students mirrored their counterparts' positive attitudes, they volunteered other atypical comments: "... I need more time to study...," "challenging...," "...I take this seriously...," "...it is a tool to get what I want...."

Unlike other schools, every student mentioned someone they would trade places with. The list was very diverse: Blair Underwood (LA Law), John Paul II, Donald Trump, God, Ambassador, Michael Jordan, and any millionaire. Most figures mentioned were men of material means and/or maintained positions of privilege.

Personal accomplishments which would make their parents most proud centered almost exclusively upon advanced academic achievement: law school, high honor roll, honors graduate, international scholarship, high GPA. College was a "given" and almost superseded by professional school. It is, then, almost redundant to write that they viewed their diploma as "just" one of several educational rites of passage.

The characteristics of teachers mentioned were diverse, and their praise focused on WHAT each teacher instilled or represented in the academic arena and less on the affective nature mentioned so prominently at other schools: "interesting," "challenging," "disciplined," "intelligent," "well-versed," "instilled leadership," "pushes," "gives all," "wide exposure to all subjects." These responses were strikingly atypical. As expected of this group, most men attended church

out of a sense of desire, personal duty, guilt (at times), and service. Some of their statements can be construed as stereotypically "Catholic" responses (although I am on dubious ground, since I never asked them to list a denomination), I was especially struck by the comment that attending church realized their goal of "giving something back."

The changes which they would like to make in society differed very little from previous responses. However, most of the responses would be categorized under the heading of "social concerns"--i.e., hunger, economics, poverty, crime, racism.

Another significant contrast lay in the type of activity students enjoyed working hard for/at. The majority of Black men at St. Joe's mentioned academic activities (in direct contrast to the plethora of sports activities previously named). Many mentioned grades, languages, and helping others, while the number who mentioned sports placed it in the context of "lessons you learn while playing the sport" as important as (or more than) the sport itself.

Parents continued to be the most influential group in their lives but not in the numbers previously cited. There was an even number of responses in the categories of friends, relatives and a combination of all three (parents, relatives, and friends). Most men named colleges such as Harvard, Howard, Georgia Tech, University of Michigan as their choice of colleges, and most answered the question in the context of a specific academic program. One student wanted to make sure we understood his

rationale for listing "Georgetown"; he wrote of their reputable civil service program and not their basketball team. Very few mentioned traditional sports powers.

The same qualities or characteristics of WHAT they wanted to be known for were evidenced here. One comment deserves special attention because it cogently represents an "attitude" that was not prevalent at the other schools:

> I want to be known as an honest, friendly, caring person who values close friendships. Also--a tough, hard-nosed guy who can be depended upon by his friends in difficult situations. And, finally, a competitor in all aspects of life who is willing to persevere and crush all obstacles standing in the way of my success...."

There was much evidence of parental involvement at St. Joe's. Indeed, endemic to many private academies, family or parental involvement is mandatory. One parent, a professor at Jackson State, has sent both a son and daughter to St. Joe's with clear expectations of both the school and his children. Typical of many middle/upper-class Black parents, he believes that his children need to be prepared to face a predominantly "White" world, and, consequently, St. Joe's represented a clear choice in the context of life in Jackson. For many other Black parents there was no other viable alternative within their framework for academic and vocational success.

St. Joe's would not be the school to severely test Coleman's and Hoffer's thesis. As attested by the principal's comments, it is almost solely a middle/upper-class school with limited aid for lower income families. Therefore, socio-economic status may,

as other studies suggest, be a powerful predictor of academic achievement that simultaneously undergirds the notion of "success" via continued formalized schooling. A more appropriate "test" of Coleman's and Hoffer's thesis may reside in the inner-city Catholic schools which attract or retain a significant number of economically disadvantaged Black students.

Also, there was clear evidence of a wide range of thought regarding some of the topics/questions. Some students wrote long responses qualifying their answers. A significant number of men examined the subject(s) from a multiplicity of cognitive frameworks. They demonstrated a movement from dualistic forms of thinking to a multiplicity of opinion and thought on a context-specific subject sophistication rarely found at other schools.

Piney Woods

The Piney Woods Country Life School is an 80-year old private boarding school located 21 miles southeast of Jackson, Mississippi. Its reputation extends beyond the borders of Mississippi through a small network of alumni who are proud of the longevity of the institution. The official goal for the school is to be "...a truly effective school which will prepare young people, regardless of their socioeconomic background, for success academically, vocationally and for life in general...."

The headmaster of the school, Dr. Charles Beady, maintains that the "thread that holds all of what we do together...is the "effective schools" philosophy (fathered by Edmonds and Brookover), which he describes as follows:

1) We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us;
2) We already know more than we need to do that; and,
3) Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we have not done so.

Beady also maintains that failure in school results from a strong sense of futility. Based on the research of Brookover, et. al., he notes:

Students who report high academic futility are thought to feel that the academic "deck of life" is stacked against them and that there is relatively little they can do to overcome this situation... High academic futility results from a schedule of negative interactions in the school sociopsychological environment which in turn act upon the student's perceptions to reinforce the notion that no matter how hard s/he works, factors in the environment will inhibit academic success. Once an individual internalizes this notion, futility becomes its own self-fulfilling prophecy.... [He concludes:] ... most of the programs and strategies that have been utilized (over the course of the last four years) at Piney Woods have been formulated to facilitate an academic climate and impact upon some student sense of academic futility in such a way as to foster high achievement among at-risk students who come from primarily lower socio-economic, single-parent backgrounds.

Accordingly, Dr. Beady has implemented the following strategies, which he believes facilitates increased achievement:

1. Classes are offered in two-hour blocks.
2. Classes are segregated by sex.
3. Grades are monitored on a weekly basis.
4. No student is allowed to play sports or participate in non-education-oriented extracurricular activities if s/he falls below a "C" average in any class during a given week.
5. A non-graded elementary program has been instituted.
6. Each teacher conducts a reading class in his/her respective content area(s) for two hours every Wednesday morning.
7. Discipline is strict and consistent.
8. Student rules and regulations are made clear (boys do not wear earrings or processed curls, uniforms must be worn, no fighting, etc.) and are strictly enforced.
9. Academic goals and objectives are kept before faculty, staff and students regularly. Everyone is expected to know that our philosophy is the effective schools philosophy.
10. Teachers and staff are encouraged to be consistent with

students.

11. Academic preparation is stressed as the primary reason for the school's existence.
12. Grading is based on mastery of objectives.
13. Students who receive a grade below a "C" average for a given nine-week period are given an "I" rather than a failing grade and are allowed the following nine weeks to make up the incomplete.

In sum, Dr. Beady reiterates the message given to students at Piney Woods: "The academic deck of life is not stacked against you here. You can learn. We will see to it that you do."

The campus environment revolves around a system of discipline and control. While awaiting the secondary school principal, I noticed that some staff wore walkie-talkies, which were "networked" into various security points and administrative offices. While there was no visible sign of a prison-life existence, there was an atmosphere of a daily "grind" which symbolized a military academy.

As the young men were ushered to the library, there was a sense of excitement and intrigue as their daily rigor was (temporarily) disturbed. We handed out the surveys and expressed to them our desire that they should take their time and answer the questions in an honest, reflective manner. Their responses were the most varied, unique, and (at times) the most poignant among the other schools examined.

Responses--Piney Woods Country Life School

All surveys requested that no student needed to write his name on his response sheet and the practice of anonymity continued until I reviewed Piney Woods responses. Charles Davis

replied: "I like everything I said here and I want it to be known that I said it." The statement proved to be a precursor to the type of responses which followed.

The average grade point stood at 3.0 with their estimated GPA potential a 3.6--a difference of -.6, which was similar to St. Joe's exact averages. This must be viewed within the context of the stated guidelines of the school, which indicate that ALL students should receive at least a "D" since grades of "F" are initially listed as "I"s.

Their overall attitudes towards school, while not as enthusiastic as St. Joe's students, were somewhat more positive than their public school peers. One did admit..."just to keep my popularity I tell my peers: I hate it." Very few (12%) were indifferent.

Since all students must work, the question of work was a moot point. The amount of hours worked did vary from 10 to 20 a week. Their responses showed no demonstrable resentment towards the mandatory work rule.

Regarding who they would trade places with, the responses were broadly based, with the names of entertainers and businessmen a close-second to no one. Others mentioned political figures, sports stars, academicians, and ministers. One particularly striking response in the category of no one replied: "I like my life both good and bad--at least I can say I'm what got me here". This individuality would be expressed at later points, delineating difference them from their public school

counterparts.

Again and again, advancing in formal education was the most important accomplishment these young men could achieve to make their parent(s) most proud. The diploma was viewed as a minimum expectation, with college and professional schools prominently named as proud accomplishments for their parent(s). Significantly, no one mentioned sports awards or future professional expectations, (although they would be mentioned later). There were only a few no responses (10%), and the surveys contained some interesting responses which (again) were not in evidence at the other schools:
"... to be the best in whatever I do so she (mother) will be able to say good things about me in public..."; "...to get a good understanding of life and God. I have been away form both for so long...."

From their responses on future benefits of their diploma, I felt (for the first time) that this category/question may have been "blurred" in the minds of these young men. Many of them mentioned that the diploma would be a steppingstone to a good job. When I examined some of their other responses in other categories, I discovered that the occupations named would require higher education. Thus, I could not assume that if a student stated that a high school diploma was directly related to a job, it meant that it was (necessarily) a "blue-collar" vocation/job. Therefore, this category did not necessarily reflect their views about advancement towards a higher education. Indeed, one could

assume that they had a very clear understanding that the college degree was an obligatory step towards the future vocation.

The most popular profession (again) was law. One comment was especially meaningful:"... to be an attorney because all my life I've been helping my brother out of trouble, or helping him to receive a less harsh punishment by using words that I hear in grown-up conversation..."

Another mentioned possibilities in both ministry and law by stating:"...I'm good at talking and I'm good with God." One particularly pragmatic young man wrote: "...a mortician because someone always dies...." There were very few "blue-collar" jobs mentioned (10%). The rest of the responses were varied and predicated upon a college diploma.

Akin to public school males, Piney Woods men listed affective characteristics over cognitive characteristics of favorite teachers by 57% to 27%. A few combined elements of both cognitive and affective characteristics: "...my eighth grade teacher loved us so much--he used to come and teach us the Constitution on Saturday without pay..."; "...pushes me to strive for the best and not be a doorknob. This is important because if no one pushes me, I am only going to do enough to get by." "... he tries so hard to come up with new and more effective ways to teach and learn. I figure if he tries that hard to teach and learn from us, I can try even harder to learn." Unlike the public school students, only 15% chose not to respond. Since chapel attendance is mandatory, all attended religious services.

It is important to note that 32% stated that they would attend regardless of the mandated policy. 37% replied that they would attend at home because they both have to and desire to. Many responded that if given the option of attending, they would attend but not every week.

There was a wide variety of responses to social conditions which they would alter if given the opportunity. Racism held a slight edge as the most debilitating factor of life in America (20%). Others (20%) mentioned issues concerning around lack of jobs and poverty. Others (35%) named issues as diverse as abortion, school reform, taxes, welfare, crime, drugs, capital punishment, and politics. I was struck by the (first-time) mention of a pressing problem generally ignored--teen pregnancy.

Again, sports dominated extra-curricular activities (42%), with various hobbies (25%) and academic pursuits (22%) close behind. The number of responses in the academic area closely mirrored St. Joe's. (The correlation with public schools was the number of men who would like to become professional athletes.)

Parent(s) were the major influence in their lives (58%). I thought their peers might have a larger influence, considering they attend a boarding school, but this was not the case. Only 20% mentioned friends as their primary influence. One young man wrote fondly of his mother: "...because it is just she and I and she wants me to be the best I can be...."

Predominately Black colleges dominated their responses on where they would attend if given the opportunity (43%). In

particular, Morehouse College was mentioned most frequently. Traditional sports powers were next (35%) and traditional academic colleges last (15%). Interestingly enough, few mentioned in-state colleges. There was only one no response.

Again, a wide variety of responses was elicited about the type of characteristics they would like to be known for. There was a remarkable degree of consistency in this category for all schools. I was impressed with the diversity and overall positive characteristics mentioned by many young men. There was no one dominant characteristic universally named.

While the ambition level of these young men did not match the intensity of St. Joe's men, their desire to succeed (academically) was certainly above their public school counterparts. The school is tightly organized and managed; however, their responses did contain a certain individualized tone, as characterized by some of the above responses.

I noted that one of the fundamental differences in administrative philosophy was between Piney Woods and Bailey Alternative. While Piney Woods adheres to a strict code of rules, Bailey negotiates rules and behavior. The administration of Bailey believes it does little good to guide students authoritatively with rules and regulations which are externally based--meaning they (the students) had little interaction with the rationale or enforcement of the rules. They hold that when students leave that type of environment (they) will be looking for someone or some institution to guide, lead, or direct their

actions. This leaves the student with the idea that s/he can do little to change his/her environment. This challenge can only be answered with follow-up studies on Piney Woods graduates.

In a review of the literature I noticed that a New Orleans City School "super committee" recommended the following for Black males: 1) all male magnet schools; 2) required uniforms; 3) year-round school; 4) greater use of school buildings for community activities; and, 5) on-site prevention program for at-risk students.[19] I was struck by the similarity of these recommendations and the environment and philosophy at Piney Woods.

Composite Profile

I have resisted the notion that Black men are a monolith. However, for summarization purposes, I will attempt to portray a compilation of their responses.

Most men felt that (given their understanding of the grading standards) they could achieve a higher average. I felt that they knew they could do better. The "system" was not necessarily against them (which in and of itself is not remarkable, given the high percentage of minorities in each school -- meaning they did not have to compete with a different culture, with the exception

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[19]. Antoine Garibladi., (ed.) "Educating Black Male Youth: A Moral and Civic Imperative". An Introspective Look at Black Male Students in the New Orleans Public Schools. The Committee to Study the Status of the Black Male in the New Orleans Public Schools. New Orleans Parish School Board, 1988.

of St. Joe's, where Black males had assimilated into the dominant White culture).

Work outside of school did not seem to present a formidable barrier to academic achievement. Few complained that work kept them from being more involved with school or "school work." Given the limited number of jobs available to Black youths, the number of nonworking males was not surprising. This stands in stark contrast to the number of white males who are working and accumulating material possessions. This is daily, vivid evidence to Blacks of Whites' "getting ahead" before they (even) graduate from high school.

The work ethic at Piney Woods is an important tenet of the school and an "emphasis" that is missing among the other institutions. Whether this "ethic" leads to a greater appreciation for the educational environment or leads to a more disciplined approach or investment in education than among the other schools is unknown.

There is a noticeable lack of animosity or resentment towards attending school. This should not be misconstrued to mean that Black males see education as a "sure-fire" investment in their future. I view this attitude as having more to do with many men feeling that (at least) the environment is not hostile to their presence, which could not have been stated in the previous decade. They DO understand that there is a direct correlation between a high school diploma or a degree "paying-off"--they do not have direct community evidence of education

translating into "dollars and cents." They have much evidence of careers in athletics, music, drug-dealing, and crime representing well-paid activities in their community. The disappearance of members of the Black middle class (even in their SMALL numbers) in inner-city neighborhoods has left a shortage of desirable role models. While we know that role models vary within a chronological stage; knowing that the diversity or opportunity exists is critical to hopes for improving Black males' matriculation rates to college.

Many Black men felt good enough about themselves to answer "no one" when asked who they would like to trade places with in life. Unlike some educators and psychologists, I do not choose here to "second-guess" their responses. Indeed, Bruce Hare and Louis Castnell found that the self-esteem of Black males was no different from other groups. They just value things which they excel in outside school. The implications are that if home and school are consonant, there will be less room or reason to devalue school.[20]

There was consistent evidence of parental concern with their graduation from high school. Indeed, many responded that their

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[20]. B.R. Hare and Louis Castnell. "No Place to Run, No Place to Hide: Comparative Status and Future Prospects of Black Boys." In Beginnings: The Social and Affective Development of Black Children, edited by M.B. Spencer, G.K. Brookins, and W.R. Allen, 201-14. Hillsdale, J.J. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

motivation to stay in school was their belief that parents would be immensely disappointed if they did not finish. It was also clear that many of the parents (who had not attained a diploma) were especially concerned about their progress towards high school graduation. Their parents' vocational positions (or lack thereof) were vivid, living pictures of a lack of mobility and financial viability.

There was much diversity concerning their choice of future careers. While many highlighted highly visible and lucrative professions, there was some variance in the types of jobs they felt they could choose for their future. Unfortunately, most of their role models (for many of the professions mentioned) were chosen from television and NOT from "successful" role models in their immediate community. Schiamberg noted in 1986 that 50% of black males in a middle school he surveyed aspired to professional and technical jobs. However, in a follow-up study (he) found that only 7% held such positions.[21]

With the exception of St. Joe's, most Black men mentioned affective characteristics of teachers as the most important aspect of successful teaching. It was clear that they desired teachers to relate to them on a personal level. They also universally respected teachers who took their jobs seriously and

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[21]. L. D. Schiamberg. The Influence of Family on Educational and Occupational Achievement. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Philadelphia, PA.. 1966.

were able to clarify and expand upon the school's curriculum. Johnson and Prom-Jackson also found that when 813 minority, low-income children were asked what characteristics they most appreciated in their teachers, the answers were in the affective domain: pleasant, helpful, caring, and sensitive.[22]

After talking to members of the Black community in Jackson, it was clear that church attendance, once mandatory for all Black youths, has diminished. However, their numbers have not mirrored the drop among their white counterparts. In comparison, Black youth voluntarily attend church in almost twice the numbers (in ratio) to whites. I could not detect any correlation, however, between what they heard or experienced in church and their attitudes toward education.

As I stated before, I was somewhat surprised that these Black men did not mention racism as an inhibiting force in America. There was the same diversity of answers regarding change in America as among Whites.

Physical activity was essential to most Black men. I was curious about their answers in light of my observation of several physical education classes where many of them were lethargic and apathetic towards many of the activities. This may have more to do with some teachers' lack of enthusiasm,their relative noninterest in certain sports, and the school environment. Most

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[22]. S. T. Johnson and S. Prom-Jackson, "The Memorable Teacher: Implications for Teacher Selection." The Journal of Negro Education. 55: 272-83, 1986.

of their enthusiasm was reserved for either the "organized" competitive sports or neighborhood activities.

Black men were aware of a wide range of colleges and many mentioned colleges they would like to attend out-of-state. However, many had no idea about what life was like at many of the out-state-colleges mentioned and had only "heard" about or had witnessed their respective sports teams on television (e.g., Georgetown, UCLA).

Their parents had more of an influence on their actions than I would have predicted. How this influence is manifested is a complicated question. With the minor exception of Lanier and Bailey, student behavior is not a major problem with most teachers at these schools. While direct parental involvement is not high, (again) with the exception of St. Joe's, there does seem to be evidence from responses regarding parental influence that they consider their parents' wishes before becoming involved in questionable activities.

Along with their optimism regarding potential grade point average was their sense of destiny. The vast majority of Black men wanted to be known as men of character and purpose.

Conclusion

I began this project with several questions: 1) How do Black men feel about their education and their future; 2) How does a particular school culture affect their attitudes towards the latter; 3) Is any one school culture especially effective in

advancing their education beyond high school?

I believe it is clear that most Black men desire the same opportunities in life as their white counterparts. Aside from the debilitating effects of poverty and racism (which is quite an "aside"), Black men appear not to suffer from low self-esteem nor low self-evaluation of their academic potential. They, at least, believe that they can succeed in school. What is in question is their interest and investment in education as a means of"getting ahead."

If, as John Ogbu has suggested, there is only a tacit understanding of this correlation, then we have a long way to go in reaching many Black men. However, if there are school environments which are particularly effective in reaching Black men, then we must reconsider our strategies for advancing the notion of academic and vocational advancement.

With regard to the second question, it was also clear that once a black family had achieved a middle-to upper-class status in Jackson, their educational options were much improved, with the exception of two all-white academies. St. Joe's combined a strong religious culture with an equally strong commitment to diversity which was especially effective in producing Black academic achievement. The problem, however, is that (once again) socio-economic status has been shown to be such a strong factor in academic achievement that it diminishes the argument for Black advancement. It is a cyclical argument in that for Blacks to achieve, they must first have the MEANS to enter this

environment. I must point out that this is particularly true for Jackson, Mississippi, but the same does not necessarily hold true for cities such as Detroit, where black Catholic schools are not exclusively upper-middle class.

Because Black men are not a monolith, what "works" for them in education is not just one model school. It is clear that many different school cultures may "work." The issue is options. If these communities are not given the same educational opportunities and diversity in choice as their white counterparts, then we will fail in our attempts to reach all Black youth. There is evidence of a "need" for Murrah, Bailey, Piney Woods, St. Joe's, and Lanier schools. They provide strategies for improving Black male participation and achievement in school. Combining this research with a review of the literature on Black males, reveals several areas which need to be seriously examined if much improvement in the educational achievement levels of Black males is to be actualized in the decade of the nineties.

Recommendations

1. Mentoring Programs. It is clear from the interviews that many of the role models for Black males are in rarified fields. For Black men to have an expanded view or vision of what they can achieve, they need more contact with men from diverse professional fields. Beyond that, they need relationships with others who will encourage their academic endeavors. The greatest resources may be found in local businesses that would

encourage/reward employee participation with Black youth. Additionally, colleges and universities are awakening to the need to serve the community near their campuses; and, since many campuses border urban areas, they can provide schools with mentors and tutors. Also, churches can be rich resources as ministers realize the importance of this current need and encourage participation with local schools and neighborhood organizations.

2. Peer Tutoring. One of the more effective programs from the decade of the eighties is peer tutoring. By encouraging students who have successfully completed (or are well on their way towards completing) their education, Black males can visibly relate to those people who are not far in age and experience from themselves. This is also a way to decrease negative peer pressure, which has been identified as an inhibiting force in adolescence.

3. Curriculum Shift. There needs to be a greater commitment (on the part of curriculum committees and administrators) to advance the positive learning styles, culture, and history of Black people. This should be magnified in the classroom, where the pedagogical strengths (that are exhibited in the black community) are integrated with other teaching methodologies. As Black males become aware of the congruity between what they have learned traditionally to value and what is recognized and rewarded in the classroom, their interest in the learning process will improve.

4. Teacher Education. Universities and colleges need to do a

better job in preparing White teachers to interact with and teach Black males. Little attention is paid to an examination of the environment, history, culture, and learning styles of Black youths, especially males. There is little demographic evidence to suggest that the typical classroom teacher of the nineties will be any different from the current profile (white, female). Therefore, institutions of higher education must shoulder the responsibility for adequately preparing their students for this population. Cross-cultural mentoring programs need to be seriously investigated.

5. Leadership Roles. Black men need to be encouraged to hold leadership roles both in and outside the classroom. If we allow the same type of opportunities which have been recently afforded them in sports, then we will come a long way in assisting their efforts in other key academic fields. Teachers and administrators need to identify leadership characteristics in Black males which will provide the necessary modeling for their peer group and their self-esteem needed during adolescence.

6. Black Teachers. If current demographic trends continue, the number of minority teachers will actually decline.[23] While we can do a better job of preparing White teachers for minority classrooms, they cannot substitute for visible role models in the classroom. We must "target" more Black students for the teaching profession. This means early identification, sufficient

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[23]. "More Minority Teachers May Quit", Lee Daniels, New York Times, October 5, 1988, p. B28.

financial awards, and scholarships for Black students and a teacher education program that will encourage and recognize their importance to the teaching profession. Specifically, we must attract more Black men to consider teaching on ALL levels.

7. Role Models. Since it will take time to attract more Black men to the teaching profession, we must provide them with visible role models from the community. This means inviting more Black men into the classroom in order for them to "tell their story." Numerous studies and experience concur that the classroom is enriched by outside resources. There are valuable human resources in many communities that, if invited, will share their experiences with students.

8. Homogeneous Classes. Recent research and practice in three inner-cities (New Orleans, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia) encouraged schools (who service large Black populations) to consider educating Black males as a group. Much like the argument for women's colleges, some educators believe that Black males need an environment which will allow them to focus on their academic needs without competing social pressures. While some argue that this is not "real world" education, it does merit consideration when the environment becomes overwhelmingly oppressive and damaging to the further education of Black males.

Because the demographics surrounding Black males' are so ominous, there must be specific intervention strategies for educational communities that contain significant Black populations. Also, the positive attitudes and attributes of

Black men discovered in this study need to be capitalized upon by an administrative and teaching force which is well prepared for this student population.

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